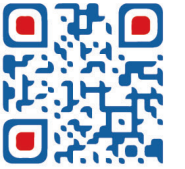


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Simple, direct art

Although Zou Tao was trained in art from childhood, his biggest ambition was to paint billboards. The death of his 1,000-yuan dream job in the 1980s urged Zou ahead into his present career.

Zou captures the spirit of life in China's rural northeast in ridiculous and exaggerated paintings that seem both nostalgic and fantastically bored with the world.

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Confiscated homes bomb at city's first public auction

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

The Beijing Municipal People's Court has placed three pieces of real estate seized from online criminals up for auction. Only one of the homes drew any bids although notice of the auction was published 15 days in advance.

The auction is the court's first attempt to resolve conflicts over property seized from people convicted of committing fraud over Taobao.com, Alibaba's popular marketplace. It is the second attempt nationwide since a similar auction by the Zhejiang Provincial People's Court in 2012.

The three properties are located in Ziyun Xili and Tonghui Beili, all in Tongzhou District.

Starting prices for the apartments were 1.29 million yuan and 2.95 million yuan. The third property, a villa in the International Garden Community, had a starting price of 20.8 million yuan and a minimum deposit of 1.2 million yuan.



The online property auction attracted fewer bidders than expected. CFP Photo

Only the apartment in Tonghui Beili attracted any bids. The first bid was 1.29 million yuan; the second bidder offered only 5,000 yuan more.

Guo Cuicui, an attorney from Fengtai Court, said the court will keep the bidding details sealed for 24 hours until the transaction to complete.

According to the rules, the court will slash the price by 20 percent after the first unsuccessful bid and 20 percent after the second unsuccessful round. The villa may eventually sell for 16 million yuan.

That could be why more than 60,000 visitors to the online auction decided not to participate.

"The auction was a success because it was the first time the court sold off a confiscated property," said Yang Jinwen, a social science scholar at Tsinghua University.

"But in the process, we have to keep a close eye on the courts. Many courts like to raise the prices for the online auction to make the bid fail, then offer it to the court staff at a lower price."

The key is to get the word out about the auction as early as possible. Notices of auction should be published online and on the walls of the courthouse, Yang said.

Death of automatic library machines goes unmourned

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

Five years ago, the communities of Tuanjiehu and Maizidian installed 150 automatic library machines on the streets and in cultural plazas to encourage residents of the nearby communities to read.

Today, most of the machines sit in trash heaps with a few left to rust on the side of the road.

The machines were doomed from the moment they were installed. In addition to eccentric residents complaining that the book depositories were "hotboxes of radiation," the machines offered little in the way of interesting reading material.

Only two weeks ago, a Tuanjiehu resident surnamed Zhang filed a formal complaint with community authorities alleging that the library machine near his home – which is kept powered on around the clock – was poisoning his family with radiation and that he feared for their health.

While an investigation revealed that the machine emitted no more radiation than a common mobile phone, the community opted to power it down and permanently brand the automatic library as being "Under Maintenance."

"Even if you can find one that works, it's hard to find a good book in one of the automatic machines," says Yang Jian, a nearby resident.

"Two years ago, I found about a book called *Road in Red China*. I have never managed to get it from the machine in spite of two years of trying," she says.

Nongzhan South Street has two machines in operation – both facing each



Although the automatic libraries attracted attention early on, they quickly become known for offering a poor selection of books. CFP Photo

other. The one on the south side of the street is under the administration of Tuanjiehu Community while the one on the north side falls under Maizidian.

Both machines break several times per day, causing high maintenance fees as workers are constantly deployed to service them.

Statistics from Chaoyang Library show that only 154,594 books were borrowed while 169,859 were returned. Registrations peaked with 4,663 users.

These figures account for 70 percent of the total library users in all 18 of Beijing's districts and counties.

"My kids like cartoons. I like novels,"

Yang says. "But these machines never have anything I want to read."

Yang spent 30 minutes checking through the machine's catalog before giving up her attempt to find a good book.

"Each automatic library can hold only 402 books at a time. We try to cycle out the catalog every 60 days," says a Chaoyang Library staff member who refused to be named.

"The entire notion of installing an automatic library is ridiculous," says Wang Jun, a professor of social science at Beijing University.

"The people who go to the library to get books are elderly residents and adults who enjoy the personal service and the

opportunity to browse. The children will just download digital editions on their iPads or e-readers," Wang says. "The only winner here is whoever made and maintained the machines."

Wang compared it to taxi pools, which were intended to create a central pickup location for people seeking empty cabs. Although the city has thousands of them, none is ever used.

"It's another example of a stupid idea designed to 'upgrade' society, but which gives no thought whatsoever to actual needs or sustainable operations," Wang says. "It's an atrocious waste in the slow march toward modernization."

Gov gambles on gimmicks to save the bookstore



Sanlian Taofen Bookstore stays open overnight, the only readers who take advantage of this are students, kids and journalists.

CFP PHOTO

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff

Inspired by Sanlian Taofen Bookstore's decision to keep round-the-clock hours in April, the privately owned Bushuwo announced plans to adopt a similar schedule starting June 1.

The chain's new headquarters on Deshengmen Wai Avenue were created with a 5 million yuan investment from Beijing Genuine & Profound Culture Media, the chain's parent company.

During its first week as a 24-hour bookstore, Sanlian Taofen reported nightly earnings of between 20,000 and 30,000 yuan. Revenue has since stabilized at around 10,000 to 20,000 yuan per night.

Chen Liming, CEO of Bushuwo's parent company, said it plans to turn the store into a culture complex with a library, coffee bar, digital reading room and mini-theater. The company is applying for government funding to support its expanded operations.

But Chen Shaofeng, vice director of the Institute of Culture Industry Research at Peking University, said the store's decision runs contrary to industrial trends, making it risky for both the company and its government supporters.

Beijingers are not known for their active

night lives, and keeping a bookstore open between midnight and 8 am is a meaningless waste of resources, Chen said.

Different conditions

Local officials who back the project may be seeking to copy Chenpin Book Store in Taipei, another successful 24-hour business.

Chenpin has bookstores throughout Taiwan, but only the bookstore in Taipei has been successful with its 24-hour business.

The municipal government of Beijing and the local Dongcheng District government offered subsidies to Sanlian Taofen Bookstore and are planning to support Bushuwo Bookstore as it makes its move to a 24-hour culture center.

But it's not the extra hours that are allowing bookstores to profit: it's the subsidies.

Bookstore death is a worldwide trend. Borders, the second largest bookstore group in the US, went bankrupt only two years ago.

In the 1990s, Borders had 1,500 chain locations in most supermarkets and cafes. The yellow, round Borders logo was eye catching, and many new books had to go through the chain's network to arrange a mass market release.

But Borders could not withstand the

rise of digital media. It cut back to only 600 outlets at the turn of the millennium. Today it has zero.

Another bookstore chain, Barnes and Noble, began bankruptcy proceedings in 2012. Last year, the privately owned Coliseum Bookstore also closed.

"The shift to e-readers and online shopping killed the bookstore," says Li Dongdong, director of Dangdang.com, China's largest domestic bookseller.

In the past few years, tens of thousands of Chinese bookstores have filed for bankruptcy. Casualties include the Zhengfeng Bookstore in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province and Wansheng Shuyuan in Beijing.

In Hangzhou, the local government spends 3 million yuan per year to support the growth of private bookstores. In Shanghai, the municipal government spends 5 million yuan.

"Throwing money is the wrong way to support the development of bookstores. They have to think some other ideas about how to support their survival," Li said.

What lies ahead?

Bookstores have been downsizing in China since early 2010. Calls to save them began almost immediately.

"In the future, it's inevitable that most of the bookstores will die off as people shift to making more of their purchases online,"

said Wang Jun, a professor of social studies at Peking University.

"A limited number of bookstores are needed for book releases and cultural events," he said. "But these are very different needs from 24-hour operations."

Some Chinese bookstores are searching for alternative businesses, such as Xiao Baiwu (Little White House) by Tsinghua University. The private bookstore hosts lectures, gatherings and seminars every weekend. The events attract people to meet, exchange and explore their views – and to pick up a few books.

"Bookstores should become a place for people to gather and meet," said Zhang Yuejiao, a regular participant at the event. "Only in this way can bookstore have a future."

Last year, the Chaoyang District government placed 150 automatic book lending machines on the streets of the district to help people maintain the habit of reading as bookstores vanish. Many people complained that they couldn't borrow or find the books they wanted to read on those machines. All 150 have been retired.

Bushuwo's proposal offers a better option for a government eager to foster readers. Its proposed cultural activities include calligraphy lessons, swap meets and lectures on crosstalk and pingtan.

Young painter's search for simple, direct art

By ZHAO HONGYI
Beijing Today Staff



Piano Player



A Piece of Meat



Fermented Bread



A Bowl of Porridge

Zou Tao's paintings capture life in the countryside of China's mountainous northeast.

Born in Shenyang, Zou has been working as a professional painter since 2002. Most of his works seem ridiculous and exaggerated – full of tactile impressions that lead visitors to believe he is dissatisfied with life or at least bored with the world around him.

Zou has painted since his early childhood, and was admitted to an art school in Shenyang's Tiexi District when he was 12 years old.

Initially he planned to make a career as a billboard painter, because in the 1980s a billboard painter earned more than 1,000 yuan. By the time he graduated, the industry had switched over to a modern mass printing process.

In the early 2000s, Zou joined the design faculty at the Lu Xun Academy of Contemporary Arts. After deep thought, he decided to return to his interest in painting.

The rich folklore of the northeast gave Zou inspiration and stimulation, and he began to paint many familiar figures from his life.

"I found my predecessors were too great: they painted nearly every aspect of life," Zou said. "Feng Zhikai was an active painter during the era of the Republic of China (1911-1949). His works were powerful because of the strength of his subjects."

Since 2011, he has focused on following Feng's example.

Meat, hard liquor and crunchy snacks are how people in China's northeast welcome their guests. And so Zou named his first solo exhibition "Meat, Liquor and Pretzels."

Zou's art features busy people on the search for a better life. Zou says that pure search is meaningful, and much better than the intrigue and conflict that defines life in many big cities.

He also paints people living hand to mouth on the edge of poverty – those marginalized by modern society.

"Their story is important because they are a reminder of just how far from perfect our country remains," he said.

Joy Art Space

Where: D-10, 798 Art Zone, 2 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

When: Through June 8

Tel: 5978 9788

Q&A with Zou Tao

Q: What experience shaped your artistic style?

A: I suffered some very hard years between 2005 and 2010. I think that is when I discovered my personal direction and style. It took me a long time to invent an artistic language to show what was going on in my mind during that time.

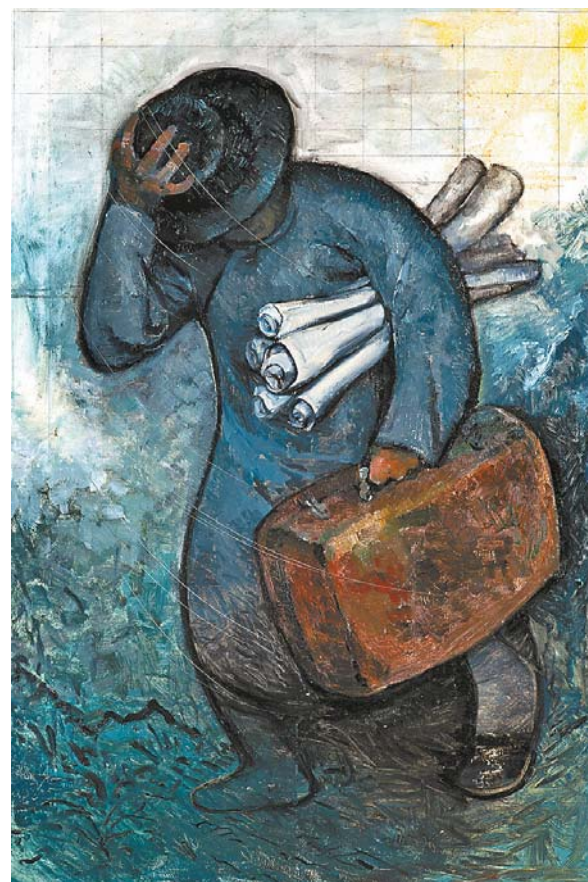
Q: What are some folk elements you've adapted from northeast China?

A: There are too many. People in the northeast are honest and straightforward: they seldom put on airs. That's one of the reasons I don't want to leave my hometown.

I share many things with other people in northeast China – what they hate and what they love – and all these are reflected in my work.

Q: You've claimed to be heavily influenced by Feng Zhikai. What have you learned from him?

A: Feng Zhikai was a great folk painter before the liberation in 1949. He created amateur figures from rough lines and sketches. Feng reminded me that it's OK to dump the rules that society expects us to follow. I started to follow my heart and draw what I enjoy. I think the rough style makes my work more attractive and friendly. But Feng was an ink painter while I'm an oil painter.



Painter in the Republic of China



A Bread

Qu's abstract art powered by Zen

By **ZHAO HONGYI**
Beijing Today Staff

Qu Qianmei's latest mixed media exhibition includes abstract works that capture the spirit of loneliness, love and nostalgia.

Born in 1956 in a small village in Zhejiang Province, Qu began to study painting when she was eight years old. She moved to France in 1985, where she began to drift away from Chinese paintings and gravitate toward expressionism.

At first, Qu focused on the small rivers and hills of her hometown, expressing her feelings through imaginative imagery. As her skills progressed, she moved on to larger ideas.

She went to Tibet in 2008 on a tour and discovered a greater love of humanity and emotion that has helped propel her work to a higher standard. Since then, Qu has created a vast body of abstract works in such diverse themes as love, trees, rivers and the observance of the universe.

Many of her works have been exhibited in Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Singapore and Taiwan. Her abstract creations have been praised for exploring a new means of interpreting abstract scenery: one akin to Zen and Taoism.

Qu has been awarded the Free Soldier Medal by the French government, and her works are held by galleries such as the Rouen Cathedral in Paris, Spain ID Olympic, Barwell Art Funds, Taiwan Dawujiang Art Funds and the Taiwan Yong Mei Art Fund.

"European life brought freedom to her abstract expression, but Oriental Zen and Taoism defined the feeling behind her work," said Jia Fangzhou, curator of Qu's solo exhibition.

Asian Art Center

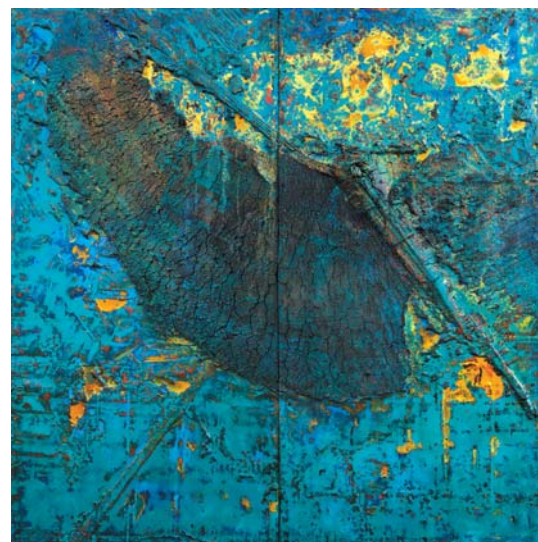
Where: 798 East Street, 798 Art Zone, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

When: Through June 8

Tel: 5978 9709



Clouds



Green Leaves



Take You Home



Snow Paradise

CCTV orders up 'A Bite of China,' hold the food



Photos by CFP

By DIAO DIAO
Beijing Today Intern

The popular documentary series *A Bite of China* has captured the attention of the nation since it began in 2012. Each episode offers in-depth investigations into the dining traditions and ingredients used in major families of Chinese cuisine.

But given how much *A Bite of China* did right, it's amazing how much CCTV's second season seems to be getting wrong.

After seeing *A Bite of China*, fans could all agree on one thing: they wanted more. They wanted it so bad that CCTV bumped ahead the new season's release date.

But with five of its eight episodes aired, viewers seem more disappointed than satisfied.

Billed as a national documentary, *A Bite of China* introduced different Chinese cuisines and dining cultures. Delicious foods and unique cooking methods are presented, as are some of China's more rare and unusual ingredients.

Directors of each chapter were required to read several books about culi-

nary arts before selecting a topic and angle to ensure the accuracy of the program. China's dining culture has a long history, and the first season introduced only a small part of it.

But five episodes in, the criticism has turned vicious.

The first episode featured a man climbing a "40-meter tree" to collect honey without any protection. But botanist Gu Yourong recognized the tree, the size of its leaves and the surrounding area and confirmed the tree was not even close to being that height.

Where *A Bite of China's* first season focused on food, the second season waltzes in an awful cross between melodrama and reality TV. In the fourth episode, one woman complains that she hasn't seen her husband in five years, and that she hasn't gone home to visit her sick family members because she needs to take her daughter to violin class.

Other viewers have pointed out that many of the scenes are recycled from other documentaries, and that specific restaurants have been taking advantage



of CCTV to promote themselves whereas the first season omitted restaurant names to focus on food.

One of the directors, Chen Xiaoqing, says the focus is still on food, but that they can't help showing the "touching" stories of the people who prepare it.

But many viewers say they will stick with the series in hopes that the final three episodes return to the series' origi-

nal focus: Chinese food.

Directors said a third season is being scheduled, and it may investigate the rarely-known stories behind the names of popular dishes. It may also outline the historical development of China's cuisines and present changes Chinese cooking is going through in the present day.

Gifts to surprise your child on Children's Day

By DIAO DIAO

Beijing Today Intern

Children's Day is right around the corner, and that means it's time to find a new and creative present.

For the child who won't be content with toy cars or dolls, DIY projects are a better alternative to keep them entertained and help them develop useful skills.

Oil painting and model homes are two fun options.

Oil painting by numbers

Complex brush techniques, tools and chemicals make oil painting difficult for children, but this approach helps them to master the basics.

Oil painting by numbers is easy because the basic shapes are provided on the canvas. Each number stands for one of the colors supplied in the kit. Full kits include a canvas, a collection of brushes and all the paints needed to complete the picture.

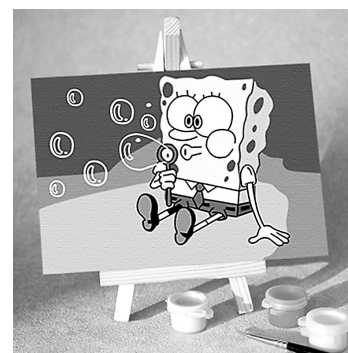
Children should start with the lightest colors, like white or yellow. Oil paints are opaque and mistakes can be covered up, but lights are easier to cover than darks.

When painting, cover the black lines that separate colored areas. It will make the finished work seem more like a real painting. Two coats are recommended to completely cover the numbers: light colors may require even more coats. Try to keep the brush strokes going in the same direction.

Although oil paints do dry out, they can still smear when they come in contact with water.

There are different sizes and difficulties. Big pictures are more difficult and have many colors while small ones with fewer may be better for young children. Hanging the finished picture in your home can help encourage your child to complete more.

There are many kits made domestically that feature scenery or popular cartoon characters like Xiao Huihui, Hello Kitty, Winnie the Pooh and Sponge Bob. Scenery is more difficult and may be better suited to older children.



DIY homes

Model homes also help children to concentrate. This miniature villa has everything that a real house does: a sofa, a TV, beds, stars and lamps.

All furniture must be assembled by hand. Children have to use tools like glue and scissors to completely assemble the home. The decorations have to be painted and carefully attached to the walls.

There are lots of house-themed model kits. Some include fancy furniture: others even run electricity so you can turn the lights on and off after the home is completed. There are also kits made to resemble small chocolate or candy shops. The 3D kits are usually assembled from pieces of cloth or paper.

Model homes can be fun to assemble and allow the children to imagine a very different world from the city's boxy downtown apartments.



Photos by baidu.com

Cool off with Beijing's best matcha desserts

By DIAO DIAO

Beijing Today Intern

Although matcha is best known as the powdered tea used in the Japanese tea ceremony, it originated in China during the Tang Dynasty.

Matcha is rich in trace elements. In ancient China, it was used as a kind of medicine and favored by Zen Buddhist monks. Since its introduction into Japanese cuisine, matcha has become popular all over the world.

This week we hunted down some of Beijing's best snacks that are made of matcha.



Matcha powder

Matcha ice cream

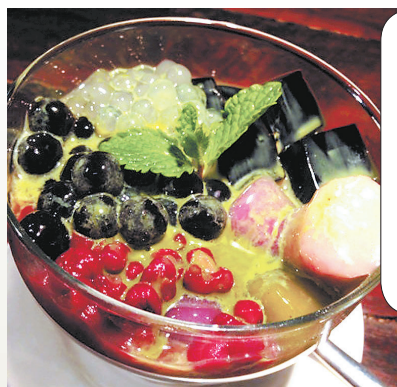
Although many fast food restaurants in Beijing are selling green tea, or matcha flavor ice cream, few are terribly satisfying. For a more traditional and thicker tasting matcha ice cream, try the Wuyutai Tea Shop on Qianmen.

As one of the oldest tea sellers in the capital, Wuyutai makes tea-flavored ice cream: matcha is its most popular flavor. It's not too sweet and the tastes a little bitter. Usually there is a line of people waiting for matcha ice cream in front of the shop.

Where: Wuyutai Tea Shop, 42 Qianmen Dajie, Dongcheng District

When: 10 am-10 pm

Cost: 6 yuan



Fun matcha

Fun matcha is a colorful concoction of simi, herbal jelly, sweet beans and taro with matcha at the bottom. The herbal jelly tastes bitter, but sweet beans and matcha work to mask it.

The Simi and tara are chewy and give the cake a juicy interior. A bowl of fun matcha is a great way to cool off in the hot summer!

Where: 253 Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng District

When: 10:30 am-2 pm; 4:30-9:30 pm

Cost: 19 yuan

Matcha Liushabao

Matcha liushabao is a popular Cantonese snack of mayonnaise encased inside a matcha flour shell. The round snack looks cute and has a fragrant matcha smell. The yellow mayonnaise tastes sweet but not greasy. It's a popular dessert after meals.

Where: Tangchao, 6 Gongti Xi Lu, Chaoyang District

When: 11 am-5 pm

Cost: 22 yuan



Matcha cake roll

Don't expect the matcha cakes at Guangsheng Cake to last through the afternoon. The store regularly sells out within a few hours of lunch.

Guangsheng's matcha cake roll is made of soft and sweet matcha cake with a layer of cream in between. The cream is light and fresh. The added red and black beans pair well with the sweet and bitter matcha cake. The cakes are pricey but worth it.

Where: SOHO, 8 Dongdaqiao Lu, Chaoyang District

When: 1:30pm-7:30 pm

Cost: 37 yuan



Photos by baidu.com and dianping.com